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ABSTRACT

Designed as a criterion-referenced scale to describe levels of writing skill development for basic essay elements, this instrument provides separate six-point rating scales for general competence of a narrative essay and the levels of development of focus and organization, support, and grammar/mechanics. The mechanics scale includes a brief guide for identifying certain errors in sentence construction, usage, spelling, punctuation and capitalization. Validity, reliability, and normative data are included. (This document is one of those reviewed in The Research Instruments Project (TRIP) monograph "Measures for Research and Evaluation in the English Language Arts, Volume 2," published by the Committee on Research of the National Council of Teachers of English in cooperation with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills. The TRIP review, included here as an introduction to the instrument, describes the instrument's category (writing), title, author, date, age range (elementary through postsecondary and adult), purpose and physical characteristics.) (HTH)

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Scale for Evaluating Narrative Writing (SENW)

The measurement instruments contained in this document have been reviewed in a monograph (cited below) edited by William T. Fagan, Charles Cooper, and Julie Jensen, for The Research Instruments Project (TRIP), and funded by a grant from the Trustees of the NCTE Research Foundation:

Measures for Research and Evaluation
in the
English Language Arts
Volume II

The purpose of the editors has been to select and review measurement instruments pertaining to all aspects of research and evaluation in the English language arts, e.g. language and language development, literacy, literature, reading (including comprehension, teacher-pupil interaction, etc.), writing, and teacher knowledge and attitudes. In order to make some of the actual instruments reviewed more readily available, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills (ERIC/RCS) has cooperated with the editors by processing selected instruments into the ERIC system (see the 42 documents assigned Clearinghouse accession numbers CS 207 904-945).

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CS207928

Category: Writing

Title: Scale for Evaluating Narrative Writing (SENW)

Author: Edys Quellmalz, Center for the Study of Evaluation, University of California, Los Angeles, CA.

Age Range: Elementary through Post-Secondary Adult

Description of Instrument:

Purpose: To evaluate and score narrative writing

Date of Construction: 1978-1981

Physical Description: SENW provides separate six-point rating scales for the general competence of an essay and the levels of development of focus and organization, support and grammer/mechanics. The mechanics scale includes a brief guide for identifying certain errors in sentence construction, usage, spelling, punctuation and capitalization. Designed as a criterion-referenced scale to describe levels of writing skill development for basic essay elements, SENW defines score points 4-6 in terms of acceptable levels of development and score points 1-3 as below competency.

As an example of one scale in SENW the complete scale for support is presented here:

SENW: Support

This element focuses on the quality (specificity and amount) of the support provided for the essay theme both within each paragraph and throughout the essay.

Supporting details should be at a greater level of specificity and depth than the generalizations they are intended to develop. Events, descriptions and characters should be fleshed out through the use of specific details, such as examples, facts, anecdotes or descriptions. These details should provide the reader with an image of the appearance, feelings, thoughts, actions or mood of the events taking place in the narrative.

Master:

6 - All events, characters and/or descriptions are well developed by

specific and clear supporting details, such as examples, descriptions, anecdotes or facts.
- Supporting statements or details provide indepth descriptions or statements about appearance, feelings, thoughts, actions and/or mood.
- Supporting details are more specific than the general ideas, events or characters they describe.

5 - Most events, descriptions and/or characters are developed through effective use of details, but the use of detail may be slightly uneven. For example, a character's physical appearance may be more fully described than his thoughts, emotions or actions.
- Supporting statements or details provide indepth descriptions about appearance, feeling, thoughts, actions and/or mood, but there may be one or two instances in which details lack depth.
- Supporting statements or details clearly are more specific than the general statements they describe.

4 - Most events, descriptions and/or characters are developed through use of details, but the use of details may be slightly uneven.
- Some of the supporting statements or details may not provide sufficient indepth descriptions about appearance, feeling, thoughts, actions and/or mood.
- Supporting statements or details clearly are more specific than the general ideas, events or characters described.

Non-Master:

3 - The use of detail is uneven. Several statements or descriptions are not developed through the use of detail.
- Some of the supporting statements are not sufficiently specific and do not provide sufficient indepth descriptions about the appearance, thoughts, actions or mood of characters, events or setting.

2 - Many supporting details or statements lack specificity and depth.
- The details are not smoothly integrated in the composition.

1 - Supporting statements are vague or confusing references to the events, characters or ideas they describe.
- There is little or no evidence of supporting details.

Validity, Reliability and Normative data

SENW is a composite of several current approaches to holistic and analytic scoring. School systems could make choices among or changes in the six scales to reflect instructional emphases or assessment philosophy. Reliability data come from controlled research and actual competency assessments in which several hundred raters have scored over 10,000 essays. After a careful training session, coefficients of reliability ranged from .89 to .91 on the subscales. Rating time per essay averages 2.3 minutes for paragraph-length compositions and 3.5 minutes for multi-paragraph essays.

Ordering Information: ERRS (ED XXX XXX)

Related documents:

Cooper, C.R. Holistic Evaluation of Writing. In C.R. Cooper and L. Odell (Eds.) Evaluating writing: describing, measuring, judging. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1977, (ED140 020).

Mullis, I.A. Scoring direct writing assessments: what are the alternatives? Educational Measurement, 1984, 3, no. 1.

ELEMENT1: GENERAL COMPETENCY

The purpose of this rating is to form an overall, or holistic, impression of a piece of writing as to how clearly it communicates a whole message to the reader. Holistic scoring assumes that each element of an essay is closely related to other characteristics of the work and that the effect is cumulative. In short, the procedure views a piece of writing as a total work, the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

For the element of General Competency, you are asked to form an overall impression concerning the effectiveness of each composition as an example of narrative writing. All of the elements presented in the scale--Focus/Organization, Support and Mechanics--should be considered in rating for General Competency.

An analogy to holistic scoring is the approval or disapproval felt by a visitor to an art gallery as he views each painting. The viewer's general assessment is a result of the whole-- or holistic-- effect of the work of art. To support the global reaction, the viewer will examine the work's more specific elements, such as color, perspective, subject or style.

In a similar way, you will read each essay first in order to form an overall impression of its quality. To assign the essay score, consider this question: To what extent does the essay orchestrate the elements of focus/organization, support and grammar/mechanics to create an effective narration? Then assign each paper a mark of 1 to 6 using the scale below:

Master:

6 - An excellent example of narration. Each element is evident in use throughout the essay. Topic is clearly identified, characters defined, situation fully developed.

5 - A good example of narration, but the elements are not equally well developed throughout the work.

4 - An adequate example of narration. The writier incorporates the elements of narration. The essay is simple, informative and clear, presenting nothing more than essentials. There may be one or two gross errors and no more than three minor errors or a total of five minor errors.

Non-Master:

3 - A developing example. Narrative presents evidence of writer's limited skill in using the narrative elements, which are all present but in a developed stage. Extremes are noted: strong to weak subject focus, proper to poor grammar and mechanics.

2 - A rudimentary example. Writer's use of elements is problematic, focus on topic steadily decreases, support statements, if present, are weak, grammatical and mechanical errors are present.

1 - Off topic or genre. Presents no central subject, supports are irrelevant or absent, contains numerous grammatical and mechanical errors. Essay cannot be understood.

ELEMENT 2: FOCUS/ORGANIZATION

This element examines whether the topic is clearly indicated and developed in an organized manner. The composition should exhibit a clear structure both within and between paragraphs. The topic should be limited and free of extraneous detail.

Master:

6 - The subject of the composition is clearly stated or implied.
- The subject is clearly developed through description of events, setting, or through the thoughts, emotions of the characters.
- Events and/or ideas are ordered according to an evident, logical progression.
- There are no digressions or extraneous details, and the topic is clearly limited.
- Transitions and linking between thoughts within paragraphs, as well as between paragraphs, are smooth and logical.

5 - The main subject of the composition is clearly stated or implied.
- The development of the main point is carried out through the description of events, characters, setting or through thoughts or emotions of characters.
- Events and/or ideas are ordered according to an evident, logical progression.
- There may be a slight digression or elaboration, but the topic is clearly limited.
- Transitions, for the most part, are logical and smooth.

4 - The main subject of the composition is clearly stated or implied.
- The development of the main point is carried out through the description/development of events, characters, setting or through the thoughts or emotions of characters.
- Most events and/or ideas are ordered according to evident, logical progression, but there may be excessive or insufficient elaboration of some aspects.
- There may be some elaboration or digression, but the topic is clearly limited.
- Most transitions are logical and smooth.

Non-Master:

3 - The main subject of the composition is clearly stated or implied.
- The development of the main point is not carried out clearly enough.
- Most events and/or ideas are ordered according to a logical progression, but there may be too much or too little elaboration of some aspects.
- There are some digressions or excessive elaborations.
- Some of the transitions are not sufficiently smooth or logical.

2 - The main subject is clear.
- The main point is not developed sufficiently.
- Events and/or ideas may not always be ordered in a logical presentation.
- There is no attempt made to limit the topic/events.
- There is little attempt made at making smooth transitions.

1 - The main subject of the composition is not clear.
- The main point is not evident.
- There is no obvious organizational plan.
- There is no attempt made to limit the topic/events.

ELEMENT 3: SUPPORT

This element focuses on the quality (specificity and amount) of the support provided for the essay theme both within each paragraph and throughout the essay.

Supporting details should be at a greater level of specificity and depth than the generalizations they are intended to develop. Events, descriptions and characters should be fleshed out through the use of specific details, such as examples, facts, anecdotes or descriptions. These details should provide the reader with an image of the appearance, feelings, thoughts, actions or mood of the events taking place in the narrative.

Master:

6 - All events, characters and/or descriptions are well developed by specific and clear supporting details, such as examples, descriptions, anecdotes or facts.
- Supporting statements or details provide indepth descriptions or statements about appearance, feelings, thoughts, actions and/or mood.
- Supporting details are more specific than the general ideas, events or characters they describe.

5 - Most events, descriptions and/or characters are developed through effective use of details, but the use of detail may be slightly uneven. For example, a character's physical appearance may be more fully described than his thoughts, emotions or actions.
- Supporting statements or details provide indepth descriptions about appearance, feeling, thoughts, actions and/or mood, but there may be one or two instances in which details lack depth.
- Supporting statements or details clearly are more specific than the general statements they describe.

4 - Most events, descriptions and/or characters are developed through use of details, but the use of details may be slightly uneven.
- Some of the supporting statements or details may not provide sufficient indepth descriptions about appearance, feeling, thoughts, actions and/or mood.
- Supporting statements or details clearly are more specific than the general ideas, events or characters described.

Non-Master:

3 - The use of detail is uneven. Several statements or descriptions are not developed through the use of detail.
- Some of the supporting statements are not sufficiently specific and do not provide sufficient indepth descriptions about the appearance, thoughts, actions or mood of characters, events or setting.

2 - Many supporting details or statements lack specificity and depth.
- The details are not smoothly integrated in the composition.

1 - Supporting statements are vague or confusing references to the events, characters or ideas they describe.
- There is little or no evidence of supporting details.

ELEMENT 4: GRAMMAR/MECHANICS

Errors in grammar or mechanics should be weighted according to how seriously they interfere with communication. A gross error, such as a run-on sentence or a sentence fragment, makes it difficult to understand the writer's message. A statement such as, "Tomorrow, I went to the store," also confuses the reader by obligating him to decipher which time context--future or present--the writer actually intends. By contrast, a minor error does not seriously interfere with the writer's message. For example, in the sentence, "He going to the store now," the message is clear but the grammar is incorrect. An overabundance of minor errors, however, may seriously detract from the reader's understanding. The intent in this element, then, is to evaluate errors in relation to how much they interfere with the writer's effectiveness in communicating rather than to attempt to assign different values to the myriad of possible grammatical and mechanical errors that can occur.

Master:

6 - The writer appears to have control over the usage and mechanical aspects of this essay.
- There are only one or two minor errors, if any, in mechanics. For example, there may be a few spelling errors of difficult words that most other students would not attempt to use.
- There are no gross errors that affect the work as a whole and interfere with the clarity of communication.

5 - Usage and mechanics are not a problem in this paper.
- There are only a few minor errors in usage or mechanics. For example, there may be misspellings of difficult words or confusion between who and whom.
- There may be one isolated gross error, but the general meaning is clear throughout the essay.

4 - Although usage and mechanics are not a problem, there may be a few common errors.
- Errors do not interfere with the clarity of communication. An example would be confusion of to/too/two or their/there/they're.
- There may be one or two isolated instances of gross errors and no more than three minor errors or a total of five minor errors.

Non-Master:

3 - Some errors, gross and minor, interfere with the clarity of communication. There may be a long run-on sentence, inappropriate fragments, confusion of subject-object pronouns, incorrect tense continuity or errors in subject-verb agreement.

2 - Errors--such as confusing antecedent, omissions of key words and serious misspellings of common words--occasionally detract from the clarity of communication.
- There are many gross and minor errors throughout the essay.

1 - Mechanical errors make this paper very difficult to read and understand.
- There are many gross errors that cause a significant amount of communication to be lost.
- Nearly every sentence contains some type of gross or minor error.
- Errors are not restricted to one type of problem, such as run-on sentences.

EXAMPLES OF MECHANICS/GRAMMAR ERRORS

I. Sentence Construction

Gross errors:

- tense continuity (Yesterday I go to...)
- very long run-on sentences
- fragments

Minor errors:

- subject/verb agreement (He go to the store)
- short run-ons
- incorrect or lack of connectors between clauses (So they can move to where they think it's safe and to one the devil's playground)

II. Usage

Gross errors:

- incorrect use of common words
- code switching (mixing languages). (Today I played with my sister y fuimos to the store)

Minor errors:

- homonyms (to, too, two; their, there, they're)
- incorrect pronoun reference (That is she's book)
- awkward or odd use of words/phrases, but meaning still clear.

III. Spelling

Gross errors:

- common words frequently misspelled, not including homonyms. Misspelled word counts as one error, even if the misspelling is repeated.
- words misspelled so seriously as to impede communication (mild down/ melted down)

Minor errors:

- unusual, less frequent words

IV. Punctuation/Capitalization

Gross errors:

- no periods at ends of sentences
- no apostrophes in contractions or apostrophe misplaced
- use of or omission of comma impeding understanding

Minor errors

- initial capitals; errors in common proper nouns
- commas in series or opening phrases
- periods for abbreviation

V. Paragraph Conventions

Gross Errors:
- title
- number
- inconsistency of separation convention
- absence of convention for separation

Minor Errors:
- use of spacing instead of indentation (as in business letters)

TABULAR NARRATIVE SCALE

General Competence			Focus/Organization	Support	Mechanics SC U SP P/C PC
All	6	Excellent	. subject clear . subject developed . events logical . no digressions . transitions	. all events, characters, setting developed . in depth description . support more specific than general statements	. one or two minor errors . no gross
All/ Most	5	Good	. slight digression . most transitions logical	. most developed by detail . some detail uneven . one or two instances are . detail lacks depth	. a few minor errors . may be one gross . usage + mechanics still not a problem
Most	4	Adequate	. most events logical . some over or under elaboration . some digression . most transitions smooth	. some detail lacks depth	. a few common errors . one or 2 gross + no more than 3 minor . total of 5 minor
Some	3	Developing	. subject clear . some unclear development . most events logical . some digression or excessive elaboration . some transitions not smooth or logical (and,so.but,then)	. uneven detail several statements lack detail . some support not specific . some support not relevant	. some errors interfere . some gross and minor
Few	2	Rudimentary	. main point not clear . some events not logical . no attempt to limit topic . few smooth transitions	. many details lack specificity depth relevance	. many gross and minor . some detract from clarity of communicati
None	1	Off-topic Off-genre	. subject unclear . main point unclear . no clear organization plan . no attempt to limit topic	. no support or vague, confusing, irrelevant support	. difficult to read . many gross varied

Tabular Narrative Scale

Examples of Mechanics/Grammar Errors

	GROSS	MINOR
	No Double Jeopardy on Errors	
SC	. tenses . run ons . fragments . agreement	. connectors between clauses . "of", "but", "and", "so" (to begin sentences)
U	. incorrect use of common words . mixing languages	. homonyms . pronoun reference . awkward usage . vague, abstract language
SP	. common words (not including homonyms) . misspellings that impede communication	. unusual words
P/C	. end punctuation missing (not including within run-ons) . apostrophes in contractions . commas missing so communication impeded	. initial capitals (not including run-ons) . proper nouns . commas in series or after introductory word groups . periods for abbreviations
PC	. titles . numbers . inconsistent method of separation . no method of separation	. use of spacing instead of indentation (as in business letters)

Rev. 1/82

The rationale for this hybrid holistic/analytic scale derives from writing assessment research conducted by the Center for the Study of Evaluation (CSE) (Winters, 1978; Quellmalz, 1981; Quellmalz, Capell & Chou, 1982). This research suggests that global quality judgments and analytic ratings of the same essay differ and therfore result in disagreement as to whether the writer is characterized as master or non-master. Our interest in analytic rating also reflects our belief that if assessment is to inform instructional decision making it must provide diagnostic feedback to students, parents, teachers, and program personnel.

Description of Subscales

The holistic judgment for the General Competence scale asks for a rating of total essay quality in terms of command of a specified set of basic elements: focus/organization (main ideas and organization); support and mechanics (sentence construction, usage, spelling, punctuation, capitalization). These elements were specified because they recur in both rhetorical theory and writing pedagogy as important essay components; they also represent priorities in many writing competency assessments. The individual subscales on each essay component present specific criteria to judge the writer's skill in using these essay elements.

Potential Adaptation of the Scale for Varied Assessment Contexts and Purposes

CSE has a continuing research interest in the relationship among different rating approaches to evaluating the same essay. Information provided by the holistic and analytic subscales represent one contrast of interest; we are also examining the subscales' individual combined sensitivity

to writing skill development.

Research Questions Related to Scale Elements

In particular, CSE has included subscales on Narrative Scale V which are designed to answer several research questions.

1. What rating criteria make a difference in how student writing competence is described? Are essays written by good or poor writers consistently good or poor on all essay elements? Does analytic scoring provide a differential profile of writing skill strengths and weaknesses?

2. Do holistic scorings which differ in reference to qualitative essay elements (e.g., style, originality vs. coherence, support) result in different descriptions of student competence?

3. What essay scoring criteria differentiate among skill levels of developing writiers, e.g., are variations in command of focus/organization or mechanics more characteristic of the writing of younger or lower ability writers?

Since the subscales of Narrative Scale V are designed to provide information on these questions, the scale is not presented as the definitive; it incorporates, rather, multiple methods for scoring conventionally valued elements of narrative essays.

Scale Development. The current version of Narrative Scale V has been used by hundreds of raters to score over 10,000 essays. At the end of a structured training session, percentages of rater agreement ranged from .89 to .96 on the subscales. When separate ratings were assigned to the four mechanics subskills, rating time averaged approximately 3.5 minutes per essay for multiparagraph essays and 2.3 minutes for paragraph length essays.

Relationship of Scale Elements to Curriculum

The subscales, with their accompanying operational criteria were designed to represent instructional priorities of school systems. In

an ideally integrated assessment and instructional system, criteria used to evaluate writing gathered for formal assessment should be the same as those used to evaluate and provide feedback to students on their class writing assignments. While individual classrooms might well focus on additional elements such as originality of content and style or voice, criteria used in judging formal assessment writing should reflect desired core writing elements. The Narrative Scale V includes the focus/organization, support and mechanics subscales as commonly valued basic writing elements.

Selection of individual elements on the rating scale may differ depending on the particular assessment purpose. For example, teachers might want separate ratings for focus and organization rather than have a combined scale. Also, the elaborated mechanics elements of sentence construction, usage, spelling, and punctuation/capitalization can provide useful classroom level diagnosis, particularly for younger or less proficient students whose writing displays diverse mechanical weaknesses. For large scale competency testing programs assessing older or more able students, however, a comprehensive mechanics score may suffice. Also, when paragraph-length writing samples are collected, the essay coherence subscale would not apply. Depending on the philosophy and interests of the assessment team approving rating criteria, two different holistic subscales, General Impression or General Competence, might be included.

The priorities and constraints of an applied assessment purpose will influence the specification of rating criteria. Narrative Scale V can be employed or adapted for a particular assessment setting. When it is, we suggest pilot testing rating elements to examine empirically the sensitivity of subscales to variations within the between students' writing performance and to writing elements valued and taught in the instructional program.

More detailed technical data on the characteristics of the Narrative Scale V can be requested from the CSE Writing Assessment Project, Dr. Edys Quellmalz, Project Director, UCLA Graduate School of Education, 145 Moore Hall, Los Angeles, CA., 90024.

Related References

Quellmalz, E. S. (1982). Report on Conejo Valley's Winter 1982 writing assessment. Los Angeles: University of California, Center for the Study of Evaluation.

Quellmalz, E. S., Capell, F. J. & Chou, C. Defining writing domains: Effects of discourse and response mode. Journal of Educational Measurement. 1982, 19, 241-258.

Smith, L. Measures of high school students' expository writing: Direct and indirect strategies. (Tech. Rep. No. 133). Los Angeles: University of California, Center for the Study of Evaluation.

Winters, L. (1980). The effects of differing response criteria on the assessment of writing competence. Los Angeles: University of California, Center for the Study of Evaluation.